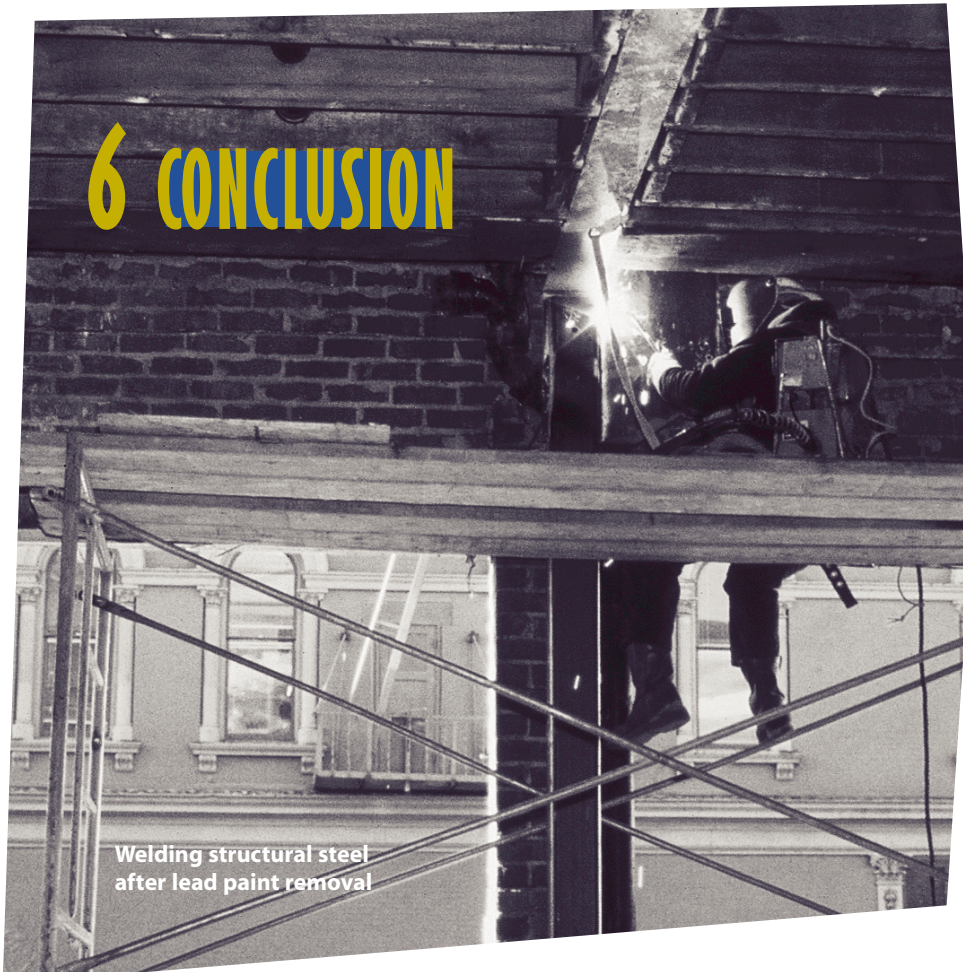


6 CONCLUSION



Welding structural steel
after lead paint removal

Despite its limitations, the Occupational Blood Lead Registry provides valuable information on lead poisoning in California workplaces. Registry data document that, although it is completely preventable, lead poisoning still occurs on a large scale in California. The problem is widespread and is not confined to a few industries. Through our case management activities we have learned that there is a serious lack of awareness of lead hazards even in industries where the risk of lead poisoning has been long known to health professionals. Small businesses in particular have difficulty establishing adequate lead safety programs and need education and extensive technical assistance. Physicians, nurses, and other health professionals also need education and consultation services, as many are not prepared to care for lead-poisoned workers and are unfamiliar with the OSHA lead standards.

Four census projects completed by OLPPP in the lead-acid battery manufacturing, nonferrous foundry, radiator repair, and wrecking and demolition industries show that, with the exception of battery manufacturing, too few companies are providing BLL testing to their employees. Together with published reports, these data indicate that compliance with the medical surveillance requirements of the Cal/OSHA lead standards is very poor in many industries.

Revisions to the laboratory BLL reporting requirement will improve our ability to calculate rates of elevated BLLs in specific groups of interest, monitor compliance with the BLL testing requirements of the lead standards, and track the progress of particular employers in reducing worker exposure to lead. However, until the majority of employers provide routine BLL testing to their lead-exposed workers, it is impossible to fully describe the magnitude and distribution of occupational lead poisoning in California, identify BLL trends in specific industries, or to draw conclusions with confidence about the impact of employer and public health intervention efforts in high-risk industries.

OLPPP will continue its efforts to increase the number of employers doing BLL testing by educating the lead-using industries, unions, workers, and health professionals about the importance of a lead medical program and employer responsibilities under the lead standards. We will also move forward on developing a specific strategy for increasing BLL testing in industrial/commercial construction. We recognize, however, that Cal/OSHA enforcement is an important partner in addressing the problem of the extensive lack of testing in lead industries. With more reliable and complete tracking data we will be better able to identify problem employers and industries and to make the most of limited resources by carefully targeting our education and intervention efforts.